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WHEN A SOUL SINGS

When a Soul Sings

POEMS

BY

PHILIP M. RASKIN

Author of "Songs of a Jew," "Songs of a Wanderer,"
"Songs and Dreams," etc.

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THE POET

There is an hour of twilight—
  Half gloom, half light;
And in that hour the heaven
  And earth unite.

And in that hour whoever
  Of God is worth
Can clasp a piece of heaven
  And stay on earth.

One day I watched the sunset
  In trance sublime,
And heard a distant echo
  "Now is the time!"

And straight came down from heaven
  A glowing dart,
And pierced with heaven's fire
  My earthly heart.

Since then my heart in twilight
  To light gives birth,
Since then I fire with heaven
  Men's hearts on earth.

GENIUS

If I were to name what is nameless within me,
The uttermost, intimate, infinite in me,
That moves me and thrills me, my blood sets on fire,
And kindles with passion my will, my desire,
That gives my soul wings that it may in its flight
Bring heaven to earth from the uppermost height;
If I were to name that mysterious power
That makes me see worlds in a dewdrop or flower,
That makes me behold in to-day's sun-lit morn
The gold and the crystal of mornings unborn;
That lets me decipher the tongue of the wave,
And bids me see life sprouting forth from the grave;
The force that gives meaning to objects around,
That I might express them in word and in sound,
The riddle of genius—that gift from above—
One name I would give it—and that would be *love!*

IN PURSUIT

I will run after youth in its vanishing wake,
I will run, and maybe, I will youth overtake,
I will beg it and pray:
Oh stay with me, stay
One more spring, one more day,
For dismal like autumn, and cold is, in truth,
A life void of youth.

I will run to my dreams on their vanishing track,
I perchance will persuade them to come to me back.
I will say: stay a while,
And just frolic and smile,
Life is dry, life is vile—
And of life but a blossomless desert is left
Of dreams when bereft.

I will run after faith—that mysterious boat,
That has kept me of yore on the life-sea afloat;
I will say in my grief
To my childhood's belief,
See, a tempest-tossed leaf
I am cast up and down without purpose or goal
With a God-empty soul.

I will run after love that is stealing away,
And, unbaring my heart, will entreat it to stay.
Oh, how can you depart
From such love-yearning heart,
When you are not a part
Of myself, but the whole, yea the whole, just the whole
Of my body and soul! . . .

A PRAYER

God, hast known me
  When I was a lad;
Did I anger Thee?
  Was I ever bad?

Did I fight or tease
  Like the other boys?
All my mates were trees,
  Flowers were my toys.

And my mates were good,
  And my toys gave joy,
For the field and wood
  Loved the dreamy boy.

God, it may seem strange
  I should doubt Thy plan,
But what made Thee change
  Boy into a man?

Can I keep up pace
  With the street and mart,
I—a man by face,
  And a child by heart?

Look how men around
  Pass me mute and cold,
I with golden sound,
  They with sound of gold.

Am I made to hate?
  Was I ever wild?
God, if not too late—
  Make me back a child. . .

THE LAST CONQUEST

I dreamt I scaled a mountain peak,
  A giant there I stood;
I heard a voice within me speak
  That thrilled my blood.

"Oh cast your glances wide and far,
  As far as you can see,
Behold the sky, the moon, the star,
  The land and sea.

"Behold the triumphs of your mind—
  The heights and peaks you scaled,
The hearts of rocks, the oceans blind,
  Their mysteries unveiled.

"The conquered space, the harnessed light,
  The waves transmitting sound;
You struggled and you won the fight,
  You sought and found.

"You catalogued each star, each sun,
  Like volumes on a shelf;
One conquest more—and you have done—
  The conquest of yourself. . . ."

PROGRESS

Through night and through storm we are slowly
emerging
From the black sea of life that around us is surging.

Be Prometheus still bound to the rock of his fate,
The flame he brought down a new dawn will create.

Be the earth still engulfed in the shadow of night—
Love will be victor, and triumph will light.

The seed sown today a future day gathers;
The sun of the son is brighter than father's.

The smiles that today are drowned in our tears
Are turned into pearls in the ocean of years.

STORIES

Oh Grandmother, tell me
The tale of the maiden
Whom pirates hold captive
  And chained in a cave,
The years keep on rolling,
But faithful her lover
The wide world is roaming
  His sweetheart to save.

Oh tell me the story—
The witch and her caldron,
And dragons emerging,
  Enormous and wild;
But one day when finding
A babe in the bushes,
The brutes become cherubs
  And rescue the child.

Oh tell me the story—
The maiden whom witchcraft
Once turned to a vampire
  Who men did ensnare,
But many years later
When meeting her lover—
The hag became woman,
  And womanly fair.

Oh tell me the story—
The beautiful orphan
Whose stepmother cruel
  Left lone in a wood;
How tigers and lions
Have shielded the baby,
And nursed her, and taught her
  The human and good.

Oh Grandmother, tell me
The stories of childhood,
Where good conquers evil
  And foe yields to friend;
In life too I oft hear
These wonderful stories—
But hear their beginning—
  Alas, not their end!

THE ROAD

Heave no sigh for things undone,
For the prize you might have won;
Don't bewail the yester-sun;
All your yesterdays are gone—
Gone!

Are you ready for today?
Roads are stretching far away;
You will stumble, you will stray,
You will have to pay your way—
Pay!

Mate thy staff and guide thy star;
Bush or stone be not thy bar;
How we fight is what we are;
Let your aim be onward far—
Far!

FAR AWAY

Far away, far away, where the cloud meets the sea,
There are heaven-hid treasures for you and for me;
On that emerald isle where the sun never sets,
Where the heart all the wrongs of our earth-life
forgets,
Far away, on that golden-lit isle in the East
No serpent of envy, no jealousy-beast
Will ever endanger our peaceful abode.
But stormy and long to that isle is the road,
For to reach that fair isle we onward must go,
We must heed not the ebb, and must fear not the flow,
And the mist and the gale we must greet with a smile,
For none but the fearless inhabit that isle.

FLOWERS

Stretches of violet, daisy and pansy,
  Primrose and poppy—I see from afar;
Do not the angels look downward and fancy
  Earth is illumined with rainbow and star?

God made them all when He felt in good humor—
  Star-spangled heaven and flower-decked sod,
That is why passing a field in the summer
  I see the smile of a satisfied God.

SUNSET

Here I stand by the shore all alone, all alone,
And I watch the sun die in yon dim-growing zone;
Watch the ringlets of gold fall and melt in the stream,
Pale and lone I look on, as I dream my sad dream.
Do I pity the day to eternity gone?
Do I fear that black raven—the night coming on?
Do I hear in the wind—in its cold-throbbing breath
The sad echo of fate that is murmuring: death!
Do I see in the sunset my youth's dying beam?
Pale and lone I look on, and I dream my sad dream.

RAIN THROUGH SUNSHINE

Rain through sunshine . . . Blue and deep
Girlish skies that smile and weep;
Waft their bubbled magic rings—
Pearly beads on opal strings—
  From a cherub's wings.

Rain through sun . . . From skyey eaves
Crystals fall on blades and leaves,
Down the rivulet and spring
Playing in a golden ring
  In the breeze aswing.

Rain through sunshine . . . Wide and far
Bead on bead and star on star—
Little fairies blue and white
Bathe in streams of molten light—
  Silver-winged and bright.

Rain through sun . . . On high, behold,
Floats a ladder steeped in gold;
I will climb it . . . one by one
Scale its rungs and reach the sun—
  Ere my day is done. . . .

BEAUTY

I was waylaid by beauty . . . the forest around,
The vales and the mountains above,
Were aglow and athrill with bloom and with sound
And breathing with life and with love . . .

I was waylaid by beauty . . . My heart standing still,
Enraptured with wonder and glee;
The flocks—little elves—gliding down from the hill,
The valley—a phosphor-lit sea. . .

I was waylaid by beauty . . . Then saw the sun hide,
As it mantled the earth in dark-grey . . .
And I bitterly cried for the day that had died,
For the beauty that lived but a day . . .

SUNSHINE

I hopped out of bed this morning,
  With the dawn I was awake;
And the sun without a warning
  Caught and brought me to the lake.

Here I watch the sky begilding
  Silver waves with golden beams,
And my heart is building, building
  Golden castles of my dreams.

Here I watch the golden fishes
  As they frightless shoreward dart,
And my golden hopes and wishes
  Dart like fishes in my heart.

Nest with nest in song are meeting,
  Bird to bird is giving word;
And my heart I hear repeating
  All the bird songs like a bird.

Rills are laughing, trees are glowing;
  I am young, and strong, and proud . . .
Trees are glowing, I am growing—
  One day I shall reach the cloud.

NIGHT

The moon with fairy fingers
  Has touched my ear and eye;
A phantom song and singers
  I hear and see on high.

On every path and turn
  The fairies of the night
Are shedding from an urn
  A purple-perfumed light.

And fragrance-full and free is
  The blue expanse around,
And audible to me is
  Each breath of silent sound.

And gaily-melancholy
  A voice from star to star
Calls: holy! holy! holy!
  Through spaceless space afar.

GIVE ME YOUR HAND . . .

Give me your hand—let us wander,
  Roaming past rivers and streams;
Somewhere, they tell me, a streamlet
  Murmurs of beautiful dreams.

Give me your hand—let us wander
  High up the mountains above,
Somewhere a rill from a mountain
  Flows with perennial love.

Give me your hand—let us wander
  Far where the night-breezes blow;
Maybe to us they will whisper
  Where fadeless the youth-blossoms grow.

Give me your hand—let us wander—
  Yond the horizon seems fair,
Happiness somewhere is hiding—
  Some day we may find out where. . . .

THE BREEZES

Shall I tell you why the breezes
  I do know so well?
If you promise that my secret
  You shall never tell.

In my heart once bloomed a garden
  Watered from above,
In that garden grew a lily
  Men on earth call love.

But one day the evening breezes
  Plucked my lily fair,
Then I caught and made the breezes
  Promise me and swear

That they would its seed and blossoms
  Scatter far apart
So that little fragrant lilies
  Grow in many a heart.

Now when twilight comes they gather—
  For they kept their oath—
And they whisperingly tell me
  Of my lily's growth.

How in hearts with grief o'ergrown
  And bestrewn with care,
Little lilies weed our worries
  Growing sweet and fair.

This is why I know the breezes
  Of the field and grove,
For they tell me of my lily
  Men on earth call love. . .

WAVES

Here I stand and watch the main—
  And how strangely it behaves!
Wave is chasing wave in vain—
  Who can tell the play of waves?

Why this hurry and this strife?
  Whither thou, oh nameless wave?
Is the sea thy source of life?
  Is it thy abysmal grave?

Am I, wave, of thee a part?
  Or art thou a part of me?
Is the sea a human heart?
  Or my heart—a human sea?

I WILL STAY OUT

I will stay out till morning,
  The moon is on the sea,
I will stay out till morning,
  The moon is good to me.

The moon can tell a story,
  The moon can sing a song
Of moon-lit nights once cherished,
  Of nights forgotten long.

I will stay out till morning
  Until the sun arrives—
Not every night is moon-night,
  Not every dream survives.
(On the *Aquitania* near France)

RIVALS

Yes, I love you,
    But you have rivals—
    Of my shipwrecked youth survivals.

Flowers
Born in twilight hours,
When heaven woos and wins our earth,
Who from their birth
Live half way
'Twixt plant and fay—
    I love them, for I know them well,
And many a charming tale
These little rainbows of the vale
    To me in childhood used to tell.

Stars
Across the azure bars,
That often waylaid me by night,
And lifted me from off the sod
On stairs of pale-blue light
Towards the garden-paths of God. . . .

Larks,
These purple sparks
Darting through the air,
Light, and blithe, and fair,

Pouring out from their bosom
Raptured rhapsodies of blossom,
And shaking off their wing
A new-born spring. . .

Woods
In all their moods
Of dawn, and dusk, and light, and shade,
With hue of leaf and bloom, and blade.

Rills
Oozing through the hills—
    Blood from the heart of a rocky giant,
And defiant
Running amock by field and glen—
To gladden hearts of men.

Yes, these are your rivals—and many more
In sky, in air, on main and shore.
To them too
I shall remain true,
    For no new love my love for them can
        stem;
And if your pride
Be satisfied—
    You may share my love with them.

THE SECRET

Fleeter than sunbeam
Swifter than lightning,
Faster than arrow
  Ever can dart
Travels the message
Wordless, unspoken,
Lover sends lover,
  Heart sends to heart.

Be it unsounded,
Be it unuttered,
Be it unwhispered
  Fearing the crowd,—
Towers and mountains,
Deserts and oceans
Take up their secret,
  Shout it aloud.

A FLOWER-SOUL

I had a baby sister
  Who scarcely yet could walk,
And "Mum, I luve the gaiden"
  Was almost all her talk.

It was a brilliant summer,
  Our garden blossomed fair,
And every God-lit morning
  I found the baby there.

She played with little pansies
  Stead little girls and boys,
She loved the little pansies—
  Her playmates and her toys.

Then Autumn came with showers,
  With chill and sullen skies;
My darling baby sister
  Forever closed her eyes.

The pansies, too, were faded,
  The garden stood in shade;
But lo! one single pansy
  Refused to pale and fade.

It bloomed as in the summer,
  It grew and glowed and smiled—
I knew it was my sister—
  The soul of a flower-child.

THE SONG OF THE STORM

Have you ever heard the tale
Of the birth of Mighty Gale?

Once a son of the Above
Cloud the Proud
With a daughter of the sea
Wave the Free
Fell in love.

Now the sky
Is bright and high,
And the sea is deep and rich,
But the oldest—which?
As to this the sky and sea
Never could agree.

So the parents did object
To the bride and groom elect,
And the sea
Ordered daughter Wave never hence
To see
Master Cloud
Vainly proud—
Whose attentions gave offence.

But man in love is undismayed,
And brave in love—a lovely maid,—
So,
When the skies
Closed their eyes,
And the deep
Fell asleep;
Cloud and Wave
Would behave
As young lovers free and gay.

Flirting she would run away;
He with laughter
Would run after,
Till he caught her
And he brought her
And he made her stay.
Then he faced her
And embraced her
Till his shaggy head would rest
On her heaving foam-white breast—
Thus they played till break of day.

But at night when the winds you hear weep,
While the thunders are laughing aloud,
Sky and Sea are aroused from their sleep,
And are searching for Wave and for Cloud.

As they find their children missing,
And detect them playing, kissing
Hidden from all sight,

Straight the aged
Grow enraged,
  And begin to fight.

The Sky gathers crowds
Of lightning-girt clouds,
  And orders them out to the shore;
Through creeks and through caves
The sea sends her waves—
  And Heaven and Sea are at war.

The armies engaging
Are threatening, raging,
  To chaos the world to transform,
And people in terror
Call always in error
  This heavenly warfare—a storm.

A FLOWER FIELD IN TENNESSEE

I came to the end of a lane
In a village in Tennessee,
And lo! by the road in a vale
I gazed on a flowery sea!
Fair as fancy
Violet, pansy,
Daffodil, daisy,
Wild and mazy!
Green, white, yellow,
Velvety-mellow,
Posy on posy,
Ruby and rosy—
Thousands of them!
Thousands of them!

Poppies all over,
Hyacinth, clover,
Field-wide scattered,
Sky-bespattered,
Sun-besprinkled,
Pearly-wrinkled,
Bending, turning,
Glowing, burning—
Thousands of them!
Thousands of them!

Snow-like drifted,
Heads uplifted,
Sway and rollick,
Play and frolic,
Gay as starlings,
Sun-kissed darlings,
Frisking, waving,
Sun-light craving,
  Thousands of them!
  Thousands of them!
Tall and taller,
Changing color,
Rippling streamlets,
Strewn with beamlets.
Swaying, winding,
Color-blinding,
Light as air is—
Dancing fairies—
  Fairies of the vale.

WOMAN

I sail in a silvery sea,
  Each heave of the breeze—a caress;
Will she come, will she come to me?—
  My heart is whispering: yes!

A woman's heart, like the sea,
  Is changing with ebb and with flow;
Will she come, will she come to me?—
  My heart is whispering: no!

A WAGER

My heart and my mind made a wager;
The heart said: to her he shall go;
The mind, an experienced stager—
Said: no!

I could not decide, but for whiling
Away the long hour—watched the sun;
It set all aglow and all smiling—
The heart won!

STELLA

Her voice so sweet and mellow
  Protection sought from rain,
So under my umbrella
  I took her 'cross the lane.

I am a bashful fellow,
  Can well myself restrain,
But under the umbrella—
  Of course, I tried in vain.

I kissed her. To my sorrow,
  She left me in disdain;
But on the *sunny* morrow
  I Stella met again.

I shamed to speak to Stella,
  But she just asked me plain:
"Why have you no umbrella?—
  It may begin to rain." . . .

HEREDITY

I wooed her—and lost her; he scorned her—and won
her,
Now when I think of it—perhaps she was right;
She would have offspring brawny, sturdy,
With steely muscle and sinew tight.

To climb an oak or shoot an eagle;
Be lost in the forest without a guide;
Dig caves in a creek, and in a canoe
Plow the waves and laugh at the tide.

Mine would have been with brain-stuff and soul-stuff,
Mind-diggers, pale, with dreamy eyes;
I wooed her—and lost her; he scorned her and won
her,
Now when I think of it—perhaps she was wise.

IN A CAR

The night was without a star. . .
  The trees were crouching in pain. . .
It was beginning to rain—
  I boarded a car.

A solitary woman sat in the car
  Huddled up in a heavy coat;
  The tram heaved up and down like a boat;
The woman's gaze was vacant and far.

I sat opposite her–
  Our eyes met.
She was not fair—
  And yet—

At that moment she was to me very dear,
And it seemed to me that she guessed
All that my soul had oppressed in years long gone—
And was ready to give me her hand—

What wonder; a woman, she could understand!
And if my word be true,
There was a moment, too,
When I was ready to put my head
Into her lap, and shed

All the tears
That have for years
Been waiting in my breast
To escape and to give me rest. . .
The prayer of her gazes I heard,
Yet dared not breathe a word,
Nor even a smile to exchange.
Alas, so near and yet so strange!
And suddenly the car stopped and she was gone,
And I was left alone. . . .

IS LOVE RESTFUL?

She stood in the cornfield—a queen of Eve's daughters,
  Around her the field all ablaze.
The blue lake behind with its clear, limpid waters
  As dreamy and calm as her gaze.

I asked if she knew for the traveler a haven
  Where night could be restfully spent;
She looked in my eyes—at my hair black as raven;
  And pointed in smiles to her tent.

Her floor was with violets decked and narcisses,
  Her canvas as white as her breast;
And, burning beneath her passionate kisses,
  I asked her if love can give rest. . . .

ONCE SHE WAS

(To K. S.)

Once she was the fairest lily
  In the garden of my dreams,
And I drank her perfume stilly,
  As a lily—heaven's beams;
Then drew autumn dim and chilly
  Freezing summer streams.

Autumn drew—I needed fuel,
  Cold my heart had grown, forsooth;
And again my garden's jewel
  Came and brought the scent of youth—
Spring's revival, love's renewal—
  Faith in life and truth.

Yes, she came, and her arrival,
  Like the fabled magic ring,
Touched my heart with Love's revival,
  Made my soul of youth to sing,
Made a snowy head to rival
  With a heart of Spring. . . .

WHAT HAS BECOME OF THE ROSE?

(Serenade)

What has become of the rose,
When summer-days close?
  I asked what became of the rose;
But your lips when I saw
Like a spring-blossom glow—
  I knew what became of the rose.

Where is, oh where is the lark
In winter-nights dark?
  I asked what became of the lark;
But your voice when I heard
Like the trill of a bird—
  I knew what became of the lark.

Where hides the sun's golden ray,
When dead is the day?
  I searched for the sun's golden ray;
But I looked at your hair
All beam-woven fair—
  And I knew who had stolen the ray.

Where are the stars to be found
That fall to the ground?
I asked where the stars could be found;
But beholding your eyes,
Like the star-jeweled skies—
I knew where the stars could be found.

Where is the peace and the rest
That fled from my breast?
I searched for my peace and my rest;
But I thought of my sweet
Whom I never shall meet,
And I knew who had stolen my rest.

A SHORT LIFE

See this lily of the vale,
Frail and pale,
Short its life, and yet its tale
    Is of love and duty.
How its glorious life was spent
Shedding scent,
Making someone's heart content—
    What a life of beauty!

From the moment of its birth
Joy and mirth,
Sweetness pouring on God's earth
    From its fragrant bosom.
Would that my life here were too
Lily-true;
Who would mind to pass it through
    Fast as this pale blossom.

UNCONSOLABLE

Do you see this lonesome flower
  In this autumn day,
All alone in wind and shower
  Slowly fade away;

Like an orphaned child forsaken,
  Pale and bent and frail,
By the angry tempest shaken,
  Beaten by the hail.

Cheer it not with future splendor,
  Breeze and dew and ray;
What avails? The flower tender
  Will not see that day.

JUST A DROP OF RAIN

Just a drop of rain
Fell upon my pane,
Crystal pure and clear
As a baby's tear.

"Mother, tell me why
Does the heaven cry?
Has it day or night
Not enough of light?"

"Nay, my child, the sky
Not for light does cry:
Those who always shine
Oft for darkness pine."

TOYS

All of us are little boys,
We are all in need of toys.
Some will play at "Free and Gay,"
Some will play at "Fast and Pray,"
Some will chance the highest stake
For a pretty girl's sake;
Some will play at "Let us Think,"
Some will play at "Let us Drink,"
Some will talk and some will sing,
Some will play "My Lord and King,"
Some will play at "Shoot and Slay,"
But whatever play we may—
Mother Earth is calling: "Boys,
Long enough you've made a noise.
See, the sun has hid its head;
Say your prayers, and go to bed."

HAPPINESS

A horde of blind beggars
  Ashiver with cold,
Half starving, but jealous
  And greedy for gold.

And passing a man plays
  A joke on the blind:
"A dollar I fling for
  Whoever will find."

They wriggle, they struggle,
  They fight on the ground;
While each thinks the other
  The treasure has found.

MY DAYS

Thus comes my day,
  And thus it goes;
We meet as friends,
  We part as foes.

Each day comes in
  With promise sweet,
Each day steals out—
  A cheat, a cheat!

The morn I bless,
  The eve I curse,
And never can
  I this reverse.

THE BIG FALL

The mount of life is high;
  The mud of life is thick;
Some men fall down to die,
  And some still worse—to stick.

But all are rolling down
  The fatal muddy slope;
Some yell, some whine, some frown,
  Some grasp the reed of hope.

But saddest of it all—
  That to the very end,
And while they fall and fall—
  They fancy they ascend. . .

COURAGE

The raven night
Spread out its wings
O'er a starless sky
And loaded the air
With unfallen hail.
  Alone on the road,
  On the edge of a rock
  He listened to the moan
  Of the wind—or a beast.
  Something was crouching
  And crawling and whining
  In the heap of herbage
By his side.
He sat on the stone
And whistled a tune.

A WOUNDED EAGLE

I was young and proud;
I was born eagle-winged and I flew
High up in the ethereal blue
Above the tower, above the cloud. . . .
  And when
Looking down upon men,
Their struggle and their strife,
Their game called life—
  I saw
The earth below
  Growing red or dark,

I stole a spark
From a sphere above—
A spark of truth, or faith, or love,
And flung it there and then
Into the hearts of men,
Enabling them to tread
Their path of black and red. . .

  But once in my flights
  Through aerial heights,
  Fate, the hunter, shot a dart,
  And pierced my heart.

And bleeding I dropped down
Into the crawling, struggling town.
And ever since that fall
On earth I crawl,
A wounded eagle bound
To man and ground—
Since then my skies are shut.
But eagle still,
With wings though cut,
My piercing eyes
Still seek the skies,
And search above
For light and love. . . .

APOLOGIA

The sky
Is high,
  And fair though far,
  Its diamond sun, its golden star,
    Bejewel day and night.

But dark and cold
  Is my lone room;
No stars of gold
  Can drive its gloom;
Upon its wall
  So dank and damp
The rays that fall
  From my dim lamp—

By far, by far
More precious are
Than sun and star
  That shed a flood of light.

The sea
Is free,
  Profound and deep;
  Its wave, so brave when tempests sweep,
    In calm is turned to gold;

But when my road
  Is far from town;
My heavy load
  So weighs me down,
Like molten ore
  The summer day,
My foot is sore
  And long my way—
    A brook, a breeze
    Will far more please
    And give me ease
      Than ocean wide and bold.

Our earth
Has mirth,
  And love and bliss,
  And woman's lips are made to kiss,
      And blood is hot.
But tired and lone
  The earth I tramp;
Give them the sun,
  Give me the lamp;
For them the hill,
  The gale, the foam,
For me the rill—
  A peaceful home.
    No passion wild,
    No love defiled,—
    A wife, a child,
      A cottage and a cot.

WHY?

Yes, I should like to know
Why the hours go,
And where they go,
And why they carry away
Day by day
Shreds of life?
And why this rush, and hue, and strife,
If I am born
A tomb to adorn?
Born in a lampless cave,
A blind slave—
To toil and moil, and wait for a grave?

And why
Should my eye
See and yet not see?
And my ear
Hear
And yet stay deaf?
And what is this sound
Around,
Below, above, athwart the ground—
Has this strange rhapsody a clef?
And is there a guide to lead me?
And is there a hand to feed me?

Or has my food—
Whether bad or good—
No need of host or chef?

And why should a heart like mine
Pulse and throb, and long and pine,
And love, and strive, and desire—
To burn out in an ashen fire?

And what is life itself?
A dusty book on a shelf
For some magician to decipher?
A foolish riddle that at best
Will in a trillion years be guessed,
When brain with cell is rifer?

A game of ball,
Where players run and fall,
But never score at all? . . .
. . . . . .
And as these questions I did ask
Of life, its purpose and its task—
I heard a voice within me speak—
Life's only purpose is to seek.

CAN YOU?

Can you show me a path in the desert,
  Can you find in the desert a stream?
Can you teach me to love amidst hatred,
  Not to lose in the darkness my dream?

Can you kindle a torch-light and guide me,
  As a mother would guide her dear child?
Can you smile to me artlessly—truly
  As of yore in my youth you have smiled?

May life's autumn have furrowed my fore-
      head—
  My heart is a fountain of youth;
May falsehood be glittering gold-robed—
  My soul is a torch-light of truth.

Can you gaze at me maidenly-purely,
  Can you be to me sisterly-near,
Can you bring me a lily unpainted,
  And a word that unhurting will cheer?

MY BOAT

My buoyant youth is shipwrecked,
  And sunk beneath life's tide;
Engulfed, too, is its cargo—
  My love—youth's jewelled pride.

Around the waves are surging,
  But I still float along,
Till pilot-death will save me—
  I sail my raft of song.

THE CITY

Gay is the city—
  My joy is gone;
Man-crowded alleys—
  Why am I lone?

Iron and marble—
  I miss the sod;
Cloisters, cathedrals—
  Where is my God?

Flower-complexions—
  City-wrought art.
Bosoms are heaving—
  Where is a heart?

Falsehood unfettered,
  Truth under ban,
Man-heaps and brick-heaps—
  Lost is the man.

Beautyless virtue—
  Passionless sin—
Light on the surface—
  Darkness within.

Word is convention—
  Smile is but frown—
Heaven the field made—
  Who made the town?

UNINVITED

Song and sunshine in the meadow,
  Breeze and fragrance in the vale;
"Why are you," she sadly whispers,
  "Why are you still lone and pale?

Mother-earth with sheen and blossom
  Feasts again her day of birth;
Where is then your birth-gift, singer,
  Where your song of light and mirth?"

Dearest mine, a vagrant step-child
  I arrived here from the East,
Homeless, friendless, uninvited
  To life's spring—its golden feast.

Here my only mate is autumn—
  Sobbing gales and weeping skies;
Autumn through my breast is sighing,
  Autumn lurking in my eyes.

Spring-tide finds me dull and silent,
  Frost in spring invades my breast;
Lone I watch the feast of sunshine
  As an uninvited guest.

IN A SUMMER NIGHT

I look out through my window
  Into the summer night,
The avenues are blazing
  Alit with purple light.

Each house—a magic tower,
  Each pane—a giant's eye;
Each lamp—a moon of crystal
  Suspended from on high.

Mysterious gates are opened,
  In pairs the people stream,
They smile, they talk in whispers—
  My heart can guess the theme.

I dream these magic alleys
  Were lowered from above,
For men to walk in beauty
  And harmony and love.

But why that far commotion,
  That distant noise and hue?
The urchins there are stoning
  An agèd, bearded Jew.

I hear the urchins' laughter,
  I see the human stream;
Gay couples smile and whisper—
  My heart can guess the theme.

The magic alleys vanish;
  With gloom my soul is filled;
The peddler weeps unheeded—
  I too—my dream is killed.

A JEWISH MOTHER

Have you seen her eyes enkindled with a moon-lit
solemn light,
As she leans above her baby through the sleepless
winter-night?

Have you heard her voice aquiver as she sings her
cradle-song,
As she praises heaven's mercy while decrying human
wrong?

"Life is patience" is her maxim; "Live and wait"—
she bids her boy;
There is happiness in wisdom, in God's word—eternal
joy.

"Under your cradle is hid
A pretty, a white little kid;
Under your cradle she dwells,
Raisins and almonds she sells,
Raisins and almonds you buy,
Torah—God's law—from on high.
Raisins and almonds are sweet,
Torah will make you discreet,
Wisdom and strength to you give,
Teach you to suffer and *live.*"

See this tiny, fragile infant—gazelle eyes and hair of silk;
Giant strength he is imbibing with each drop of mother's milk.

Thus her mother-heart was fashioned by the centuries of wrong—
Not a dove-heart half so tender, not a tigress half so strong.

If you know the Jewish mother, then perchance you understand
Why the Jew is death-defying, hunted though in every land.

EASTERN LULLABY

Sleep, my little angel, sleep,
Do not toss and do not weep.
  The night is deaf, the night is blind—
  Three nurses watch your cot behind—
  The sun, the eagle and the wind.
Stays the eagle in his nest,
Hides the sun beyond the west.
  All alone the wind does roam
  Over land and over foam;
  And to mother he comes home.
Asks his mother: "Where were you
All these long, these cold nights through,
  Did you put out moon and star,
  Did you fight the waves afar?"
"Nay, the waves I did not fight,
Nor the stars put out by night.
  The night was robed in darkness deep
  And I heard a baby weep—
  So I rocked it to its sleep."

LOVERS

Soul of my soul, look at the stars—
Sapphires scattered through ivory bars.

One more hand-clasp, one more kiss—
One more moment of love and bliss.

Free is the heart as the mountain and dell—
Let us prolong for a moment the spell.

Life has so much in a moment to give—
How many moments like this can one live?

Bent is your father, your mother is old—
What do they know of a heaven of gold?

Age has extinguished youth's flame in their eye—
What do they know of a star-burning sky?

Can they remember a star-night—a dream
Luring to moon-bewitched forest and stream?

Soul of my soul—the night is so fair,
Stars and the violets kindle the air,

Stars and the violets kindle the blood—
We are alone—and love is so good.

Wine is the air, and velvet the field—
Who to the pulses of youth will not yield?

We are alone—oh, nay, not alone—
God, and the heaven, and lovers, are one.

NOTHING MORE

Think all night and think all day,
This way, that way, every way—
Life, at best, is but a play—
Nothing more!

Meditate or reason hard—
Scoff may cynic, dream may bard—
Life is but a sharper's card—
Nothing more!

Let us then make up our mind:
Fate—our guide—is deaf and blind—
Chance is whipping it behind—
Nothing more!

LOVE

Sweetly the nightingale sang, and the echo
  Carried a passionate thrill through the grove;
Yielding she fell in her lover's embraces—
  Heaven, reveal not the secret of love!

Sadly the nightingale sang at her window,
  Weepingly answered the heavens above.
Silent her burning tears streamed on her pillow—
  Heaven, reveal not the torture of love!

Sombre, and silent the river was flowing,
  Girding with sadness the vale and the grove—
Mutely the black stream embraced and engulfed her—
  Heaven, reveal not the treason of love!

A SPARK FROM A WINDOW

A spark from a window, a rap at a door,
  A barefooted step of a maid;
A whisper, a handshake, a kiss in the dark;
  Two young daring hearts, yet afraid.

The faces unseen, and yet glowing alit,
  The room wrapped in gloom—yet too light;
The lips that are mute and the hearts that
    talk loud;
  The eyes full of sunshine by night.

The slow-waning moon, the horizon pale-blue,
  The breeze and the vanishing star;
A handshake, a kiss, stealthy steps and the
    dawn—
  A whisper—good-night—from afar. . . .

LILIES THAT FADE

Lilies that fade like the spell of a sunset,
Who has not cherished them sometime in life?
Who has not dreamt of them, loved them and lived
them
Lilies—a sweetheart, a child or a wife?

Lilies that fade—the first blush of a lover,
Lilies that fade—the first smile of a child,
Who has not dreamt of them, loved them and lived
them,
When autumn the blossoms of life has defiled?

WORTH WHILE

I have heard you complaining and whining,
As if stars in the skies were not shining,

And my muse has demanded a song—
To tell you, my friend, you are wrong!

There is Spring with its life-throbbing bosom,
There are meadows all radiant with blossom,

There are children to render the earth
A dream-land of laughter and mirth.

There is nature for those who will read it,
There is beauty for those who will heed it,

Be the heaven reserved for the blest—
There are flowers and stars for the rest.

There is woman—Man's Goddess—world over,
There is man to adore her and love her,

There is love and devotion and truth,
As real and as fragrant as youth.

There are heights where no souls have yet
hovered,
There are emerald isles undiscovered,

There is bliss unexplored and unnamed,
There is happiness waiting unclaimed.

A smile in each tear-drop is hidden,
In each desert—a beautiful Eden—

Life's laughter rings loud from each tomb,
Each winter bears spring in its womb.

And when things appear vague and uncertain,
Endeavor to lift nature's curtain;

There is search-work for heart and for mind,
And prizes for searchers who find.

FOR THE MESSIAH *

By the Jordan stands a smithy,
And a blacksmith in his smithy
  Day and night is toiling.
Up and down his bellows going,
Piff! Puff! blowing, blowing,
  Rising and recoiling.

Molten fire-snakes environ
Both the anvil and the iron
  Tongues of flame disgorging.
Molten fire spitting, spitting
While the hammer hitting, hitting
  Is the iron forging.

Hit, hit, hammer quicker,
Let the sparklets fly and flicker,
  And in pools expire.
Piff! puff! bellows blowing.
Flim! flame! sparklets flowing,
  Like a rain of fire.

"Swarthy Smith, what art thou making?"—
"I am forging, I am breaking

* Free from the Hebrew after Frishmann.

Iron sharp and pointed,—
For Messiah's steed a horse-shoe—
Hu-rah! I am forging
For the King anointed."

By the Jordan sits a weaver,
At his loom the skillful weaver
Day and night is toiling.
On the bobbins threads of cotton,
Vick! vick!—threads of cotton
Spooling on and coiling.

Through the comb he draws the cotton,
Draws the texture skill-begotten,
And his task not leaving,
Rapidly his treadle treads he,
Rapidly his fibres threads he
Ever, ever weaving.
Sun and stars peep through his scuttle,
Fast as arrow flies his shuttle,
Not a moment slowing.
To and fro and hither-thither,
Zick! zack! hither-thither—
Ever, ever going.

"Weaver, say, what art thou making?"
"Of my choicest stock I'm taking
Cords and threads disjointed,
And a garment I am weaving—

Hu-rah! I am weaving
For the King anointed."
By the Jordan lively, gaily,
An embroid'rer working daily
Never, never tires.
Pick! pick! stitching, taping—
Multicolored patterns shaping,
Just as he requires.

Eye to eyelet, stitch to stitches,
As by magic of the witches,
Fly his skillful fingers;
Gold and silk and silver fret-work—
Breathe with life upon his net-work—
He nor stops nor lingers.

Pick! pick! fast and faster
Fly the fingers of the master,
Dexterous and steady.
Pick! pick! never dropping,
Pick! pick! never stopping,
Till the work is ready.

"What, embroid'rer, art thou fitting,
Why are thus thy fingers flitting
At their task appointed?"
"I the banner am embroid'ring—
Hu-rah! am embroid'ring
For the King anointed."

Angels six through Heaven winging
To the Lord their praises singing,
  Onward, onward pressing
At the throne of God Almighty,
Hu-rah! God Almighty,
  Pray for heaven's blessing.

All that's fairest, all that's rarest,
And the nearest, and the dearest
  That to man is given,
All that's pure and good and noble,
That in hours of joy or trouble
  Man sends up to heaven;

Pride and truth and strength and passion,
Grace and pity and compassion,
  Mercy never ending,
Faith and hope and love and beauty,
Hu-rah! love and beauty—
  Mixing all and blending.

"What then, angels, are you making?"
"We are gathering and taking
  Things for us appointed.
Out of these we shape the Spirit—
Hu-rah! Shape the Spirit
  Of the King anointed."

"But, alas, our earthly brothers,
Smith and weaver and all others
Have their work completed,
While our stuff is not yet blended,
And our work is not yet ended—
Thus our aim—defeated.

See, we are not even near it—
The completion of the Spirit
With the stuff we're given:
Frail all human hopes and fears are,
Frail all human smiles and tears are
When they reach the heaven.

Human kindness lasts an hour,
Powerless is human power,
And his love—we fear it!
Woe to us, we haven't enough yet,
Woe to us, we haven't the stuff yet,
For Messiah's Spirit.

Thus at nights when winds are sighing,
One can hear the angels crying,
Angels disappointed.
"Man, sublime, is not sublime yet,
Woe to us, it is not time yet
For the King anointed!"

THE FOUR POINTS

The North, I'm told
Has mines of gold,
  But there I will not go;
For all that's sold
And bought for gold
  Is cold as northern snow.

The South's delight
Is wine and light,
  But there I will not go;
For light, I find,
Like wine, may blind
  Man's sight with dazzling glow.

The West has eyes,
The West is wise,
  But there I will not go;
For aeons far
From truth we are
  The more we deem we know.

The East has streams
That flow with dreams,
  And there, oh there I'll go
For dreams, in truth,
Are light and youth—
  They make my soul-wings grow.

THE BOOK

A book upon my table
  Lies open day and night;
I read it and re-read it
  With ever-fresh delight.

I read it and re-read it,
  And never have enough;
It speaks the heart of nature,
  It speaks the soul of love.

I hear in it the tempest
  Of deserts wide and far;
The rush of rapid rivers,
  The light-hymn of a star;

The echo of the mountains,
  The flight of human soul,
The searching and the seeking
  Of Man's immortal goal.

A book that never ages,
  That breathes perennial youth;
A book whose flaming pages
  Impress with flaming truth.

I know it will inspire
  And thrill with force divine
The heart of coming ages
  As it is thrilling mine;

I feel its truth immortal
  In every sound and breath,
And know that souls are deathless,
  And know *there is no death.*

"ELUL"

The *Elul* month is here:
  I hear the *Shofar* blow;
It brings my childhood back,
  The fair-sad long ago.

My father clasps my hand,
  And whispers in my ear;
"To *Shul,* my boy, to *Shul*—
  The 'fearful days' are near."

A mist enveils the field,
  The leaves fall off the tree,
And as they fall they speak
  In warning tones to me:

"Fair summer's bloom and song
  To gloom and cold must yield;
There comes a judgment day
  For man and wood and field."

A JEALOUS GOD

(From the Talmud)

"Akibah," once King Rufus said:
"Thou art in learning high;
Thy people hold thee great and wise —
Now canst thou tell me why—

Your mighty God, the Lord of Hosts—
You will admit it odd—
So jealous is He will not have
You call an idol, God?"

The Rabbi stood and for a while
King Rufus quietly eyed;
And then a smile lit up his face,
As calmly he replied:

"My King! I had a mangy dog,
And Rufus was its name. . ."
But pale with rage the king exclaimed:
"This is unheard of shame!

How dare you call by kingly name
A cur—a wretched thing! . . ."
The Rabbi smiled again, and said:
"There is your answer, King!"

MY GOD

And should you ask for the name of my God,
  His nature, His dwelling, His power,
I could not tell, for He lives in the clouds,
  As oft as He lives in a flower.

And should you ask for the voice of my God,
  I could but point to the wonder
That often I hear Him converse through the breeze,
  And oft through the storm and the thunder.

And as to His dwelling—I'm made to believe
  His palace the high stars is over;
But sometimes I feel that He dwells in an eye,
  When I look at the gaze of a lover.

And sometimes I think that I am a God
  That He of me but a part is;
For heaven and earth are reflected in me,
  And His habitation—my heart is.

WHITE AND BLUE

White and blue—all white and blue
Is the banner of the Jew;
White as foam, and blue as sea,
Wave-like pure, and wave-like free,
From the God-land of his birth
Sent to earth.

White and blue—all white and blue—
All the black-red ages through,
Hordes of martyrs passing on,
Waving banners in the sun:
"Man, but to thyself be true—
White and blue!"

White and blue—all white and blue!
Hermon-white and Jordan blue,
Ages old, but ever new—
"Man, be brave!
Be no slave!
Not the many, but the few
Strong of heart, and pure, and true,
Will re-paint the world anew—
White and blue!"

TO OUR PIONEERS

When I dream of you, comrades, your struggle and pain,
How you tried and you failed, and you tried once again,

From the rise of the sun to its purple eclipse,
With a hoe in your hand, with a song on your lips;

You the noble, the young, unaccustomed to toil,
With no help and no cheer, save your love for the soil,

With your sickle and plow under East-burning skies,
With a flame in your blood and a flame in your eyes,

With a love-brimming heart, and a faith-glowing soul,
And a vision afar, and a beckoning goal,

And a dream of a dawn that you knew would come true—
Oh, dear comrades, I blush that I was not with you;

That I helped not the road of the future to pave;
Build for Freedom a home, dig for Exile a grave.

But before in my heart all my cherished dreams fade,
I shall join you, dear comrades, with plow and with
spade,

That my soul might be cleansed of its slavery-stain,
That my last words may be: "I have lived not in vain!"

A SEMITE

The prophets of old in my soul left a spark—
To search in the dark.

I wander by winding, by fate-concealed ways
To the end of the days.

I dream a new sunrise, I dream a new morn
Of ages unborn.

A beacon my heart is, a compass—my soul,
With Zion as goal.

There still gleams a ray in my far-visioned eyes
Of east-glowing skies.

I long for the palm-land, its lakes and its
streams—
There still float my dreams.

I pine for the soil that my ancestors trod,—
There still lives my God.

THE SONG OF THE PEDDLER

The field or the garden—the grain or the grape!
But can I—a peddler—my life-path re-shape,
And run from my fate and the city escape?

The ghetto-slums nursed me, and there I was bred,
No grass under foot, and no sun overhead,
I sweated, I peddled, I bartered for bread.

For pennies, for pennies, my life I have sold,
I never have known that the heaven had gold,
That meadows had pearls unsearched for, untold.

In rags and in bones and in scraps was my trade,
I knew not the blessing of blossom and blade,
To toil, and to rest after toil in the shade.

When thirsty—to drink from a crystal-clear spring,
And gaze at the grain in the breezes aswing,
And hear in the distance the harvesters sing.

I knew not the bliss and the blessing of toil,
The pride of the man who has conquered the soil,
And shared in the booty, and ate of its spoil.

From city to city forever I'm thrown,
Brick of its brick and stone of its stone,
A peddler, a peddler—despised and alone.

And yet there is something still left in my blood
That tells me the blade and the blossom are good—
And I will go back to the field and the wood.

EXILE

No, you're wrong! It is not I—
Exile in my song does cry.

. . . . . .

I came out to meet the day
On a morning of a May,
With my harp to sing and play.

And a sky-lark in the air
Bade me sing while earth was fair,
While the heavens sang above,
While my heart re-echoed love.

Soon as I began to sing
Snap they went string after string,
Visions black, and anguish sharp
Took possession of my harp;
Exile fingered it—not I—
And my song came out a sigh.

Then a raven from its nest
Harshly cawed: "Fate's sad bequest
Will your song with sadness fill,
Make it weep against your will;

Those who sorrows of their tribe
With their mother's milk imbibe
Cannot sing. Their hopes are fears,
And their sweetest songs are tears."

THE ESROG

The Day of Atonement is over;
My father an *Esrog* has bought,
And never the eyes of a lover
Did sparkle as his, when he brought

And showed us the fruit that was shining
With sheen of a tropical star,
The fruit for which hearts are still pining
From homeland long exiled and far.

And never was valued a jewel
As dear as the fruit was by him—
A value the centuries cruel
Could neither efface nor bedim.

I looked at the *Esrog* the golden,
And dreamt of the orchards of gold,
I dreamt of the ages the olden
That never in hearts will grow old.

I dreamt of the rills and the fountains
That watered those gardens of yore,
The plains and the vales and the mountains
That blossomless, blossom the more. . .

I looked at my father caressing
The fruit that bejewelled his feast,
And mutely my heart sent a blessing
To Zion—the Queen of the East. . .

THE PEDDLER PRINCE

In the Synagogue half fallen,
Cobweb covered, dank and damp,
By the withered, gilt-edged tablets
And half quenched "Eternal lamp"

He is chanting every morning
Songs of David—ancient psalms,
And his kindled eyes are gazing
On a grove of breeze-tossed palms.

To and fro his head is moving
In the shadows dim and weird;
Through the dust-stained pane a sunbeam
Gilds his long, his silver beard.

Though the Service long is ended,
And the congregation gone,
Still resounds his doleful sing-song
Like an echo far and lone.

"Zion, Zion, Land of beauty,
Sky-bejewelled is thy soil. . ."
Though the House of God is emptied
For the house of sweat and toil.

Land of Beauty, Land of David—
Plain and grove and vale and hill,
Where his Kings of yore have trodden
He in dreams is treading still.

Land of Beauty—foe-invaded—
Unforgotten ever since. . .
. . . . . .
Stranger, stand aside, don't wake him—
This old peddler is a Prince.

MESSIAH

My brother, wait!
  From Zion's hill
Or soon, or late—
  Arrive he will!

Enrobed in light
  He'll wind his horn,
And drive the night,
  And light the morn,

Unchain the earth,
  Renew its youth,
And give re-birth
  To Life and Truth.

Life's stream bedimmed
  With lust and greed,
Is overbrimmed
  With blood-stained weed.

And man unmanned
  In manless strife
Has long unplanned
  The plan of life.

Till life is dim
  And man is slave—
So wait for him
  To come and save.

Look up the hill,
  Dream on thy dream,
For come he will—
  He must redeem!

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